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Peter Johnson

John Gallagher

Terry Hill

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Mango exports from Western Australia

By Peter Johnson¹, John Gallagher² and Terry Hill³

The Department of Agriculture has been at the forefront in developing a mango industry in Western Australia.

In Carnarvon, the Department is concentrating on developing an export industry, while in the Ord River Irrigation Area trials have identified suitable domestic and export varieties for that environment.

The effect of planting density, hedging and pruning techniques on yield is being examined. Research has also started on identifying superior selections of the Kensington Pride variety, the most commercially important variety in Australia. The aim is to improve fruit quality, bearing reliability, and to extend the production season.

Production

There is a wide range of mango varieties throughout the world. Fruit size varies from 150 g to more than 1000 g, while skin colour ranges from purple, red to green.

More than 70 per cent of all mango trees planted in Australia are Kensington Pride.

¹ Technical Officer, Kununurra
² Officer in Charge, Midland
³ Regional Manager, Carnarvon

George Barker with seedlings of new mango varieties being tested at Gascoyne Research Station, Carnarvon.

The Australian industry is based on a variety selected at Bowen in Queensland and first named after that town. Subsequently, the variety was renamed and is now locally called Kensington Pride or KP. In south-east Asia, importers call it the Australian Mango. Australia produced about 22,000 t of mangoes in 1992-93, of which about 19,000 t came from Queensland. The Northern Territory produced about 2000 t, Kununurra 240 t, Broome 100 t and Carnarvon 370 t (see Table).

In Australia, mangoes are mostly planted along the northern Queensland coast. During the 1980s, large areas were established in Queensland and by 1996 it is estimated that total Australian production will be about 35,000 t.

Australia’s consumption of fresh fruit is expected to be between 25,000 t and 28,000 t by the mid 1990s.

The people of Brisbane eat the most mangoes, at 2.5 kg per head per year, while Perth residents consume 1.0 to 1.5 kg per year. If Australia’s per capita consumption of mangoes approached that of Brisbane, the domestic market would nearly double.

Processing should take 7000 t and exports between 1500 t and 2000 t.
The first planting of mangoes in Australia was most likely in Queensland. Planting started in Carnarvon at the Gascoyne Research Station about 50 years ago, and about 30 years ago at Kimberley Research Station, now the Frank Wise Institute of Tropical Agricultural Research, Kununurra.

Mangoes were originally planted at Carnarvon and Kununurra as windbreaks or as ornamental trees. Mangoes have been grown as stand-alone commercial crops only recently in this State.

During the early 1980s, growers realised that there was a profitable local market for mangoes and plantations were established from Kununurra in the north to Gingin in the south. It is estimated that before the year 2000 the State's mango production will exceed local demand.

Only small quantities of mangoes are imported into Western Australia. Mango imports are restricted because Western Australia is one of the few mango-producing areas in the world free of mango seed weevil. Imported mangoes mainly come from the Philippines from June to August.

**Carnarvon**

In the early 1980s, the Department of Agriculture explored the possibility of exporting mangoes to south-east Asia. Small consignments were sent from the Gascoyne Research Station to Singapore. Returns were encouraging, but it was more profitable for growers to supply the local market.

Growers who were monitoring areas being planted and returns from the local market noticed that as production increased, wholesale prices eased. A group of Carnarvon growers realised that local market returns would fall to a level that would make export more profitable. These growers decided to develop a marketing strategy for the export market.

Research into growing mangoes includes variety trials, planting density and quality control. Gavin Foord, from Gascoyne Research Station, tests water loss from mango leaves.
The results indicated that there are good markets for Ord River mangoes in south-east Asia. November markets would be stronger than October, since production in Indonesia and the Philippines is declining during this time.

There was a mixed response in Jakarta owing to the large volume of local fruit available in October. Some supermarkets wanted more Ord River fruit while others found it hard to sell because of its high price. The Department of Agriculture will continue test-marketing its own fruit to Indonesia for the next few seasons.

Export development
Hong Kong and Singapore markets already receive Australian mangoes in December and January and exporters were uncertain how mangoes would sell in October and November. The Department of Agriculture conducted some test marketing of Ord River mangoes in October and November 1992. Fruit was sent to Hong Kong, Singapore and Jakarta.

The consignments were well received in Hong Kong and Singapore, with prices only slightly below those of the Perth market, which is well above the Australian average price at that time. Both the Hong Kong and Singapore markets can absorb large volumes of fruit.

They can store fruit longer to fill the December market, which is under-supplied in Western Australia but not in the eastern States. This is a short-term solution, only feasible while quarantine regulations prohibit imports of interstate fruit into Western Australia. This ban aims at reducing the risk of introducing mango seed weevil.

Processing is another option, but large volumes of fruit are needed for establishment of a processing plant.

The most promising option is to export, because mango production worldwide in November is low and market opportunities are available.

Ord River Irrigation Area
Mango production in the Ord River Irrigation Area is increasing rapidly. In the 1992 season, volume increased by 45 per cent despite extensive thrip damage at flowering that led to excessive fruit drop. This upward trend is expected to continue well into the next century because of extensive recent plantings.

The Ord River Irrigation Area is still only a small producer of mangoes compared with Queensland, but its earlier production of fruit is important. The Ord River produces mangoes from early October until late November. The domestic market in October is under-supplied and this trend is likely to continue for some time. The November market could become over-supplied soon.

Ord River mango growers have several future marketing choices.

Camarvon Mango Exporters (CME), formed in late 1989, now consists of 18 growers. It works with a Western Australian exporter, south-east Asian importers and the Department of Agriculture to develop a sustainable export industry based on fruit quality and innovative marketing techniques. CME's major market is Singapore, with small volumes of fruit being sold in Hong Kong. Most Carnarvon fruit is sold in January.

The group has developed a distinctive carton to enable buyers to identify the Carnarvon Mango Exporters product. It is also testing a paper tray which, unlike the traditional plastic one, absorbs sap that may flow from the fruit during transit.

Peter Johnson can be contacted on (091) 68 1160

Ord River mangoes have buyers in Singapore. Yvonne Fahl, secretary of Camarvon Mango Exporters, with, from left, Terry Hill of the Department of Agriculture, importer Roland Wong and grower Keith Collier. They are with the specially designed carton produced by Camarvon Mango Exporters.